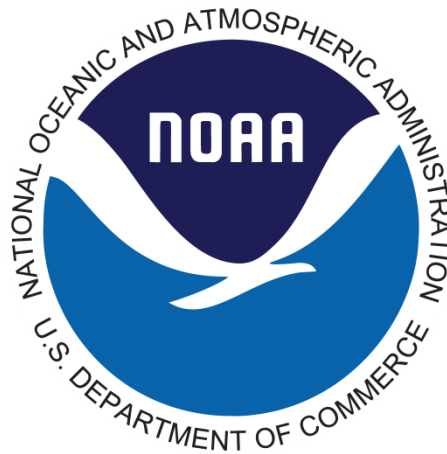


NOAA Restoration Center

DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENT

for the

NOAA RESTORATION CENTER PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT



March 5, 2012

1315 East West Hwy (F/HC3)

Silver Spring, MD 20910

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background Information	2
NOAA’S Role in Restoration.....	2
Habitat Restoration Supported by NOAA	2
Programs of the NOAA Restoration Center.....	3
Community-based Restoration Program (CRP)	3
Damage Assessment, Remediation and Restoration Program (DARRP)	4
Coastal Wetland Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) Program	4
Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Program (GLHRP)	4
NOAA Invasive Species Projects	4
American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Projects	4
Scope of the NOAA Restoration Center Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement	5
The NEPA Process	5
Purpose and Need.....	5
Authorities.....	6
Relevant Geographic Areas.....	6
Program Goals.....	6
Alternatives.....	7
Providing Comments.....	8
References	9

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - The NEPA Process	5
--	----------

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

NOAA'S ROLE IN RESTORATION

NOAA creates and builds partnerships on the local, regional and national levels to carry out habitat restoration projects within the United States and Territories. NOAA recognizes the significant role communities play in environmental restoration, and acknowledges that such projects are often best supported and implemented at the community level.

Successful projects have significant community support and depend on the hands-on involvement of citizens. NOAA's role is to strengthen the development and implementation of technically-sound restoration projects, and provide the necessary technical expertise and financial assistance through its regional and headquarters offices.

HABITAT RESTORATION SUPPORTED BY NOAA

The NOAA Restoration Center is the only office within NOAA solely devoted to restoring the nation's coastal, marine, and migratory fish habitat. Projects supported by the NOAA Restoration Center vary in terms of their size and complexity, and often benefit a wide range of habitat types and species impacted. Additionally, the diversity of restoration techniques available, geographic locations of project sites, and the number of project partners involved (i.e. the level of NOAA involvement) all influence how the overall restoration action is carried out. Typical project types currently supported by NOAA through technical and financial support include, but are not limited to:

- Fish passage (installing fish ladders, by-pass channels, nature-like fishways, dam removals, and culvert removal and replacement with bottomless arch culverts or bridges);
- Hydrologic/Tidal reconnection (berm breaching, culvert removal/replacement to allow tidal or natural flooding of wetlands, complete removal of levees and dikes or other impediments to historic/natural tidal flow or hydrology, floodplain reconnection, or creation/restoration of off-channel habitats);
- Shellfish restoration (creating, restoring, or rehabilitating shellfish and shellfish habitat);
- Coral recovery (reducing or eliminating land-based sources of pollution, reef recovery from disturbance / impacts, promoting recruitment and recovery through enhancement and protection of existing populations and natural systems, or seek to control overgrowth of invasive species or otherwise prevent loss of recruitment habitat.);

- Coastal resiliency (salt marsh and barrier island restoration, and erosion prevention through living shorelines, or that otherwise lead to increased resiliency and protection of coastal communities while supporting ecological goals);
- Habitat adaptation (protecting or restoring habitat in transition zones to provide room for habitat migration with sea level rise);
- Diadromous fish habitat (supporting diadromous fish recovery by addressing land-based sources of pollution, recovery from disturbance, restoring natural systems, or controlling invasive species or other loss of habitat);
- Marine debris removal (removing debris (solid, man-made items) from the marine environment including removal of derelict fishing gear, and other persistent mid- or large- size debris from coastal habitats);
- Great Lakes restoration (restoring habitat in Areas of Concern that address beneficial use impairment to either loss of fish and wildlife habitat or degradation of benthos);
- Threatened and endangered species projects (restoring beaches and other coastal areas used by endangered/threatened species and marine mammals).
- Invasive species removal (control / removal of localized populations, re-establishing native vegetation, monitoring for newly established species).

PROGRAMS OF THE NOAA RESTORATION CENTER

COMMUNITY-BASED RESTORATION PROGRAM (CRP)

The CRP promotes community involvement and stewardship of local projects, and invests millions of dollars annually in restoration projects, leveraging between 2 and 3 times that through partner organization in-kind and matching contributions. Through the CRP the RC provides restoration science and technical guidance, including assistance with environmental compliance, and monitoring activities. The CRP's Open River Initiative supports dam and barrier removal implementation, design, and project viability analysis. The overall goal of the initiative is to restore the natural form and function of a river or stream while improving public safety and encouraging economic growth in the area. The CRP's Community-based Marine Debris Removal Grant Program supports locally-driven, community-based marine debris prevention and removal projects that benefit coastal habitat, waterways, and wildlife. Primary emphasis is on removal of derelict fishing gear and large-scale debris removal. Education, prevention and outreach on marine debris

issues are also important components to high-quality projects supported through this program.

DAMAGE ASSESSMENT, REMEDIATION AND RESTORATION PROGRAM (DARRP)

The DARRP assesses and quantifies injuries to natural resources that result from oil spills, hazardous waste dumping, ship groundings, and other physical impacts. The program implements appropriate restoration to such injuries, and collects damages from the responsible party to do so. Progress is monitored to ensure restoration goals are met.

COASTAL WETLAND PLANNING, PROTECTION AND RESTORATION ACT (CWPPRA) PROGRAM

Through CWPPRA, NOAA works to preserve Louisiana's fish, wildlife, and their habitats by slowing the high rate of wetlands loss in Louisiana (estimated at over 16 mi² per year) and developing and utilizing the latest techniques in restoration to slow steady wetland loss. The program fosters partnerships with federal and state agencies, as well as landowners and industry.

GREAT LAKES HABITAT RESTORATION PROGRAM (GLHRP)

The GLHRP uses NOAA expertise to address lake-wide ecosystem problems, such as contaminants in sediment and the loss of high-quality fish and wildlife habitat. It builds on existing expertise and ongoing partnerships to address regional needs and focuses on restoration activities that address delisting targets for habitat-related beneficial use impairments in Great Lakes Areas of Concern.

NOAA INVASIVE SPECIES PROJECTS

NOAA is the co-chair of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force and represents the Department of Commerce as a co-chair of the National Invasive Species Council. NOAA continuously works with staff, grant recipients, and the public to promote prevention, early detection, and control of invasive species. The NOAA Restoration Center provides guidance to consider invasive species during the planning and development of habitat restoration actions, guides the technical review of the habitat restoration actions to prevent and control invasive species within the project area, and monitors for introductions of invasive species during and following restoration.

AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT (ARRA) PROJECTS

In February 2009, NOAA received \$167 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to restore coastal habitat and help jump-start the nation's economy by supporting thousands of jobs. After a rigorous selection process, the agency is funding 50 high quality, high priority coastal restoration projects.

SCOPE OF THE NOAA RESTORATION CENTER PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

NOAA proposes to develop a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of different ranges of coastal and marine habitat restoration project types conducted and supported by the NOAA Restoration Center. As described in the Federal Register (77 FR 13095) the Restoration Center has begun the public scoping process and invites the public to comment on and / or provide suggestions to further develop the recommended proposed action and alternatives for NOAA’s programmatic restoration actions. The overall public response to this notice and the environmental impact analysis that NOAA will conduct during the scoping period will determine the final list of actions and recommendations that the Draft and Final PEIS documents ultimately describe. NOAA outlines the NEPA process and proposed preliminary action and alternatives in the following sections.

THE NEPA PROCESS

NOAA will evaluate those potential impacts pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) and in compliance with the implementing regulations issued by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) and procedures issued by NOAA Administrative Order 216-6, which guide the NEPA process outlined below in Figure 1.

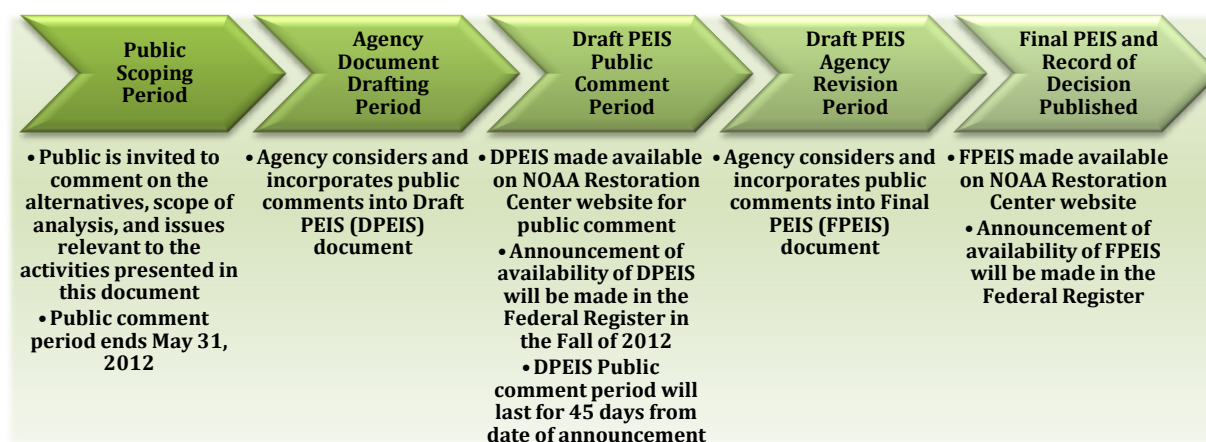


FIGURE 1 - THE NEPA PROCESS

PURPOSE AND NEED

The need for NOAA’s support for restoration stems from a historical trend of habitat loss, degradation, specific acute injuries, and continued long-term threats to the sustainability of the nation’s fishery resources. Approximately half of the original 11.7 million acres of coastal wetlands in the lower 48 states were lost between 1780 and 1978 (NOAA, 2002). Over 75 percent of commercial fisheries and 80 to 90 percent of recreational marine and

migratory fishes depend on the estuarine, coastal, and riverine habitats for all or part of their life cycles (National Safety Council 1998; NOAA 2002). Viable coastal and estuarine habitats, as well as superior water quality, are important to maintaining healthy fish stocks. Restored coastal and riverine habitat that supports migratory fish would help rebuild fisheries stocks and recover certain threatened or endangered species. Restoring these habitats would help ensure that valuable resources are available to future generations of Americans.

AUTHORITIES

- The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act of 2006 authorizes the NOAA Restoration Center to implement and support the restoration of fishery and coastal habitats by providing federal financial and technical assistance for local restoration and to promote stewardship and conservation values for NOAA trust resources.
- The Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA or Breaux Act) authorizes critical funding and support for the large-scale restoration, protection, conservation, and enhancement of threatened wetlands in the Louisiana coastal zone.
- The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) authorizes NOAA to seek damages on behalf of the public to restore natural resources within the scope of its trusteeship that are injured by the release or threatened release of hazardous substances in the environment.
- The Oil Pollution Act (OPA) authorizes NOAA to recover damages to natural resources for the discharge or threatened discharge of oil into navigable waters or adjoining shorelines, with respect to natural resources for which the agency has management or protective responsibilities.

RELEVANT GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

The Restoration Center creates and builds partnerships on local, regional and national scales to carry out habitat restoration projects within the coastal United States, Great Lakes region, and territories.

PROGRAM GOALS

NOAA develops, funds, and provides technical support for habitat restoration projects to national, regional and local groups. Habitat restoration projects, selected competitively and non-competitively, are fishery-related, coastal wetland, or other living marine resource restoration projects that will typically, but may not always, utilize one or many of the aforementioned restoration types. NOAA also supports and funds non-construction-related activities such as preliminary inventory and pre-restoration baseline monitoring,

feasibility studies, engineering and design work, or education and outreach efforts for the projects implemented through the programs listed above.

In 2002 the NOAA Restoration Center released the “NOAA Fisheries’ Implementation Plan for the Community-based Restoration Program” to document environmental compliance processes and procedures for the CRP. In 2006, the NOAA Restoration Center released a Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Assessment (SPEA) to update and further refine the environmental impact evaluation process for the CRP. Since that time, the Restoration Center has increased the scope and scale of the individual projects implemented by the CRP, as well as other Restoration Center programs. Therefore, the environmental impact analysis process under NEPA that uses the 2002 implementation plan and 2006 SPEA needs to be revised.

Accordingly, NOAA is providing notice of its intent to develop a PEIS to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of coastal and marine habitat restoration activities that the NOAA Restoration Center will conduct and support through its funding programs and restoration partners. These activities include:

1. Technical Assistance (includes planning, permitting, monitoring, research and outreach);
2. Riverine / Riparian Restoration / Associated Uplands Restoration (includes channel, bank and floodplain restoration, and buffer area and watershed revegetation);
3. Inter-tidal Restoration (includes saltmarsh and oyster restoration);
4. Sub-tidal Restoration (includes submerged aquatic vegetation and coral restoration);
5. Land and Water Acquisition.

ALTERNATIVES

Possible alternatives NOAA will explore during the scoping process include the following:

- Alternative 1 (preferred): NOAA proposes to support a comprehensive range of restoration activities through a wide variety of project types. Under this alternative, the Restoration Center would carry out Activities 1-5 (Technical Assistance, Riverine / Riparian / Associated Uplands Restoration, Sub-tidal Restoration, Inter-tidal Restoration, and Land and Water Acquisition). This alternative enables the Restoration Center to implement its programs and work toward its mission with the greatest efficiency and impact.
- Alternative 2: Under this alternative NOAA would support a more limited range of project types, limited to Activities 1-4 (Technical Assistance, Riverine / Riparian / Associated Uplands Restoration, Sub-tidal Restoration, and Inter-tidal Restoration).

This alternative, while not preferred, enables the Restoration Center to maintain a high level of efficiency and impact in implementing its programs. However, the exclusion of land and easement acquisition would steer program priorities toward on-the-ground restoration activities and technical support.

- Alternative 3: Under this alternative NOAA would support a very limited range of project types limited to Activity 1 (Technical Assistance). This alternative, while not preferred, enables the Restoration Center to support restoration activities conducted by partners.

PROVIDING COMMENTS

All interested parties are encouraged to submit written comments to the NOAA Restoration Center either electronically or by original hard copy to the address provided below. The official deadline for written comments to be included in the scoping process is May 31, 2012.

The Draft PEIS will be made publicly available for comment in fall 2012. Any substantive changes to this general timeline will be announced on the NOAA Restoration Center website, via email to interested parties, and/or in the NOAA Restoration Center's electronic newsletter.

Interested parties that wish to send questions or comments or wish to be updated regarding the timeline of this PEIS should send e-mail to the following address:

rc.compliance@noaa.gov

Interested parties that wish to send questions or comments through regular mail should use the following mailing address:

NOAA Restoration Center (F/HC3)
ATTN: Restoration PEIS Scoping
1315 East West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tom Barry at 301-427-8653 or rc.compliance@noaa.gov

REFERENCES

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). 2002. Environmental assessment: NOAA Fisheries' Implementation Plan for the Community-Based Restoration Program. Silver Spring, MD
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). 2006. Environmental assessment: Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Assessment of NOAA Fisheries' Implementation Plan for the Community-Based Restoration Program. Silver Spring, MD
- National Safety Council, Environmental Health Center. 1998. Coastal challenges: a guide to coastal and marine issues Prepared in conjunction with Coastal America.